

ARCHITECTURE OF MEMORY
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Elias Canetti, a Bulgarian author, once stated “It is the sublime miracle of the human mind: memory.” Indeed, more than any other creature, a human being’s existence is largely determined by his memory. It is what makes us who we are.

However, if memory can play such a major role in shaping the life and being of a person, can memory play a role in shaping the existence of a place, or a time? Do these have memory too? And if so, can a human being access it? How?

These are questions I seek to explore through the following case studies, showing examples of how space and architecture can capture memories. I have divided these examples into three categories: Memory belonging to a space, memory belonging to a moment, and memory belonging to a person.

9/11 MEMORIAL

Michael Arad/Peter Walker and Partners

The 9/11 Memorial at Ground Zero was built to remember and honor the people killed in the September 11th terrorist attacks and the 1993 terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center. This project was held as a competition which received over 5,000 entries. "Reflecting Absence," by the architect Michael Arad and the landscape architecture firm Peter Walker and Partners was chosen as the winning entry.

In this project, the footprints of the twin towers are represented by two large voids containing recessed pools. These voids are open and visible reminders of absence. On bronze parapets surrounding the pools are the names of all the people that died. The enormity of the space and the multitude of names underscore the vast scale of destruction that occurred at this very location.

In a statement made by the selection jury in 2004, upon their selecting of "Reflecting Absence," they claimed:

"In its powerful, yet simple articulation of the footprints of the Twin Towers, 'Reflecting Absence' has made the voids left by the destruction the primary symbols of our loss. By allowing absence to speak for itself, the designers have made the power of these empty footprints the memorial. At its core, this memorial is anchored deeply in the actual events it commemorates—This is where the text for the researched and catalogued item goes. This is where the text for the researched and catalogconnecting us to the towers' destruction, and more important, to all the lives lost on that day...



9/11 Memorial

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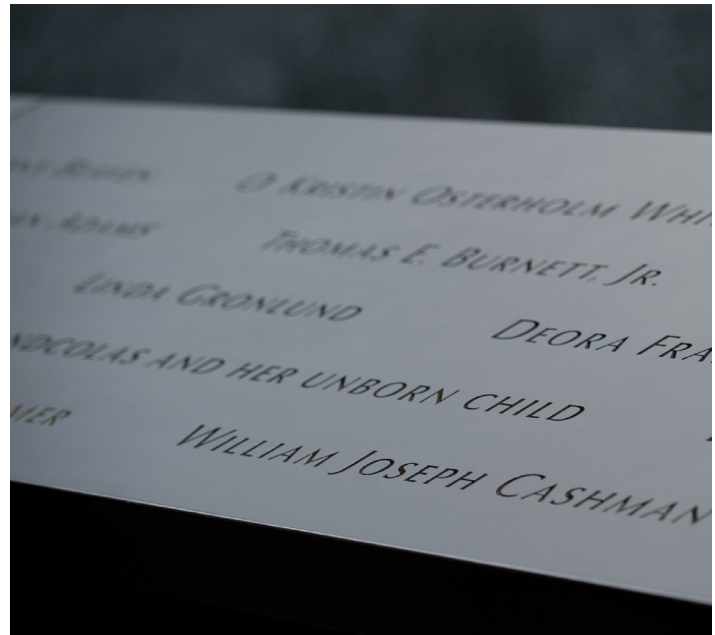
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“While the footprints remain empty, however, the surrounding plaza’s design has evolved to include beautiful groves of trees, traditional affirmations of life and rebirth. These trees, like memory itself, demand the care and nurturing of those fwho visit and tend them. They remember life with living forms, and serve as living representaions of the destruction and renewal of life in their own annual cycles, The result is a memorial that expresses both the incalculable loss of life and its consoling regeneration.”



9/11 Memorial

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Bronze Parapets

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HYPERCUBE ONL

Hypercube is another design for the September 11th Memorial. Designed by the Dutch architecture firm ONL, it is a critique of America's fascination with 9/11.

For their submission, they designed a building that lives in a permanent state of crisis—a structure that resides in a process of permanent destruction and immediate healing of its wounds. Their proposal for ground zero is an open programmable architecture, with self-executing emotional states and fully adjustable in shape and content.

In speaking about the project, ONL stated:

“We propose the concept of an e-motive architecture that would be without precedent. This concept would have an impact which is in a positive way equivalent to the 9/11 collapse. This e-motive architecture would be ready to adjust to different cultural structures and events and fit to adapt to a rich variety of use. This e-building not only reacts to different circumstances but actively proposes new configurations. This architecture would propagate both commercial and non-profit content, only this e-motive architecture would embody beauty, local pride and global awareness at the same time.

“Our proposal for WTC 9/11 shows a self-executable and programmable hi-res building which reconfigures its shape, content and character during one year of its life-cycle.”



Hypercube

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Hypercube



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Hypercube

ERASER

Doug Aitken

Eraser is a 1998 video installation by the video artist Doug Aitken. Aitken is known for treating time, space, and memory as fluid concepts.

Eraser is a three-room, seven-screen nature docu-myth of a sevel mile trek he made across the Caribbean island of Monserrat, nearly two years after the dome of the Soufrieres volcano collapsed.

Regarding the piece, one observer noted:

“There’s no voice over, only quiet, ambient music and the sounds of the jungle. What begins with low, gliding views of the shore, foliage, and dry river beds, builds with restrained momentum toward strange glimpses of abandoned bulldozers, empty stores and burned out huts; staccato shots of a deserted airstrip, the sudden appearance of a lost herd of cattle; the new barren contours of lava; and finally the inconclusive overcast sky. Somehow, he’s gotten you to understand that something terrifying happened here.”



Eraser

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RESONDING ARCHES

Gary Hill

Resounding Arches is a 2005 video installation by the video artist Gary Hill at the Coliseum in Rome.

The installation consists of projections of full body nudes, part real, part digital simulation, on the interior surfaces of the Coliseum. Each figure carries a “meta-mythological” instrument which grows and changes along with the sound it generates. This piece strives to connect both history and the future in the same place.

According to the artist:

“The images will reveal themselves slowly in the form of non-invasive apparitions of figures, through light and sound—new presences that impose themselves in the Coliseum as if they had always haunted the physical and mental spaces of the site—and the sounds will emerge from the various dark passages of the Coliseum at random intervals, to create a kind of calling or signaling that produces a metaphorical arching across the varying precepts of space and time.”



Resounding Arches-Coliseum

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Resounding Arches-Coliseum

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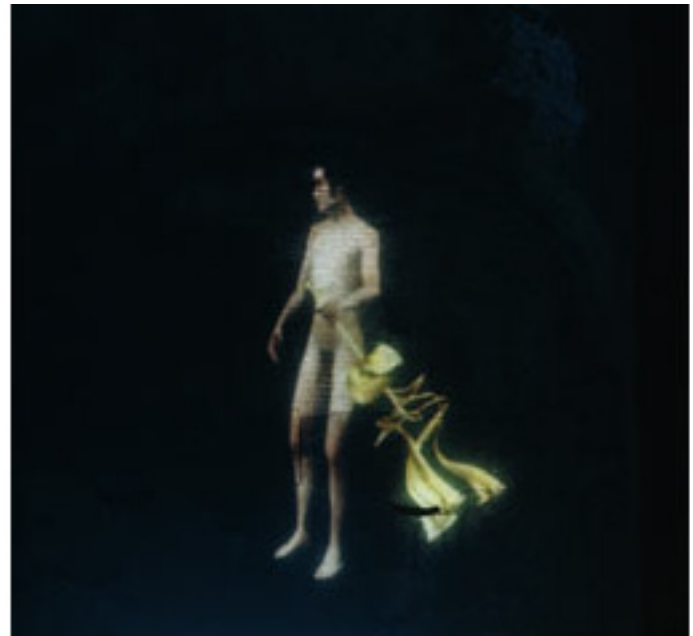


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Resounding Arches-Coliseum

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ALL THOSE VANISHED ENGINES

Stephen Vitiello

All Those Vanished Engines was a 2011 exhibition at MASS MoCA by the sound artist Stephen Vitiello at an abandoned adjacent boiler plant. Interested in spaces with a history, Vitiello strives to evoke that history through the use of sound.

The artist received his inspiration from a novel by the local author Paul Park. Placing itself largely inside this very boiler plant, the book imagines it as “cover for a secret, experimental project exploring the industrial production of sound.” When Vitiello read the book, he was touched by its evocation of space: “There was just something about how the story went through twists and turns that I identified with—like taking a field recording and giving a listener something they recognize and then transforming it in a way that takes them somewhere else, a morphing or metamorphosis. There was a sense of music at times in the books. There was also a kind of archeology that I loved—a feeling that if you scratched through the surface of one world or one character, you could discover another hidden beneath it.”

In the installation, sound emerges from 20 different places, echoing among the abandoned machinery and amplified by the acoustic properties they lend to the space.



Former Boiler Plant

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EPHEMERAL MEMORIALS

Ephemeral Memorials are phenomena that serve as a mourning function to commemorate a tragic event. They are a way for people to deal with loss, and feel support from a greater community as even strangers share in the grief of mourning. They usually consist of people leaving flowers, candles, notes and even gifts.

These memorials are often, but not always, site specific. In the case of the United Flight 93 Memorial (at right), commemorating the flight that crashed during the 9/11 Terrorist Attacks, site plays an important role, tying mourners to the location of the tragedy.

However, these memorials need not always occur at the site of the incident being commemorated. In the case of the Steve Jobs memorial (lower right), these were placed at various Apple stores throughout the country.



Memorial for United Flight 93

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Memorial for Steve Jobs at Apple Store

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Memorial for Car Crash Victims

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Memorial for Buddy Holly and Richie Valens

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SHIFTING TIME

Camille Utterback

Shifting Time is a 2010 video installation by the artist Camille Utterback. It is part of the “Liquid Time” Series, which deals with the mechanics of our “fluid” memories of places and moments in time.

Shifting Time, in particular, was commissioned by the city of San Jose for the San Jose Airport. It consists of a projection against a blank screen of an ordinary interior or exterior still image in San Jose. As the viewer walks closer to the wall, the image ripples and reveals moving pictures of the past in the same location.

This juxtaposition of past and present enables the viewer to travel through time, as their body becomes the interface with which they navigate between the different times.



Shifting Time

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Shifting Time

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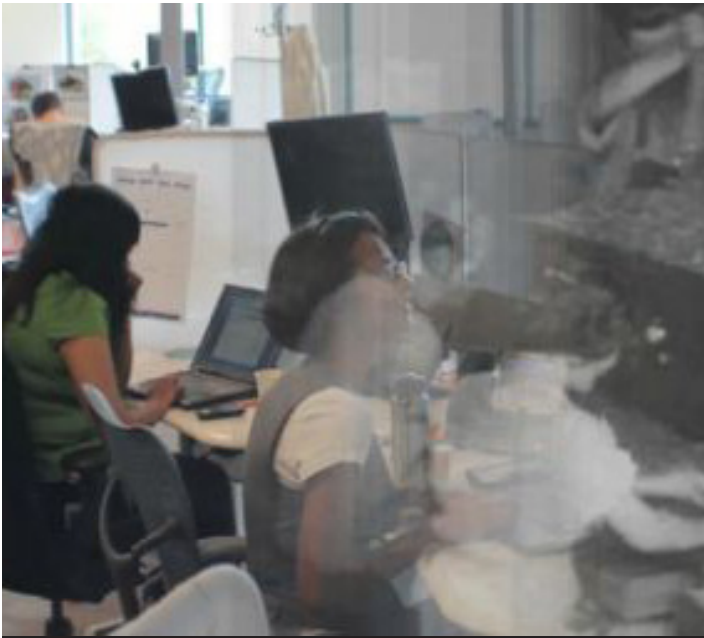


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Shifting Time

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FOOTSTEPS CANON

Keiko Takahashi

Footsteps Canon is a 2009 interactive sound installation by the artist Keiko Takahashi. This project was sponsored by the Laboratory for Experimental Computer Science at the Academy of Media Arts Cologne.

The project consists of a catwalk with sensors that detect a person's footsteps. The rhythm of their footsteps is recorded, and electric sounds that imitate the footsteps' rhythm is emitted from a speaker. These sounds are stored and looped, so that as more and more people walk on the catwalk, it becomes a full orchestration. The varying beat of a different people's footsteps turns a two-dimensional rhythm into a three-dimensional effect.



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Footsteps Canon



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Footsteps Canon



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Footsteps Canon



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Footsteps Canon

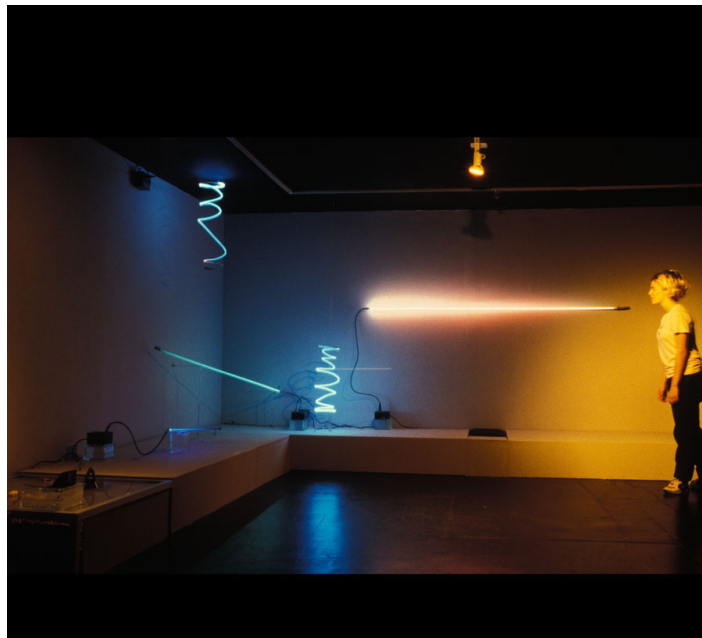
ECHO EVOLUTION

Liz Phillips

Echo Evolution is a 1999 responsive sound and light installation by the artist Liz Phillips. The project was first installed at The Kitchen in New York City in 1999 and later at The Hudson River Museum in Yonkers, New York as part of the exhibition "The Magic of Light" In 2002.

The installation is a multi-media environment, where the audience can wander and forge trails. The activity of the audience is sensed with ultrasonics and transforms the sound and light in the installation. Speed of movement, stillness, near and far acts and the distances between people are chartered to activate and characterize the sound and visual events.

Sounds in this piece are made from processed samples of spinning objects: a brass ring, a prayer bowl, a rainstick, and the rim of a wine glass. These objects were chosen because of how they evolve and transform to describe space, time, and motion. In the installation three long horizontal tubes register where activity is by light presence and absence.



Echo Evolution

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VIETNAM VETERANS MEMORIAL

Maya Lin

The Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington, D.C. is a was a controversial design by Maya Lin, a Yale architecture student. The monument consists of two adjoining walls that are sunk into the ground with the earth behind them. The names of the deceased American soldiers are engraved in Gabbro stone, imported from India.

This stone was deliberately chosen for its reflective quality, so that when a person looks at the names, he can see his own reflection simultaneously with the engraved names, bringing the past and present together.

About the Memorial, the author Adrian Parr stated “By her subdued approach and use of material, Lin does a far superior job of coming to terms with the disaster that the Vietnam War was, whether for American soldiers or Vietnamese civilians.”



Vietnam Veterans Memorial

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ISE GRAND SHRINE

Ise Grand Shrine is a Shinto shrine in the city of Ise, Japan. It is one of Shinto's holiest sites. The original structure was built in 793, and it is dismantled every 20 years and rebuilt on an adjacent site, as part of the Shinto belief of the death and renewal of nature and the impermanence of all things. The building techniques and processes are passed on from one generation to the next, and it is rebuilt in exactly the same way. Therefore, the shrine is forever new and forever ancient and original.



Ise Grand Shrine

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THE MEMORY MACHINE

Cathy Lane and Nye Parry

The Memory Machine is a context, people, and site specific interactive sound installation at the British Museum. It was developed as a collaboration between two composers, Cathy Lane and Nye Parry who share an interest in sound, oral history, and memory.

In the installation, visitors to the Museum leave a memory via a telephone in the main part of the exhibition. These memories are then played back to them in the installation.

One commentator stated: "These memories become part of an ever changing soundscape which mixes the personal memories supplied by the visitors with archive material. As they play back the memories are fragmented and transformed with different kinds of musical and sound manipulation processes and the result is heard in multi channel playback at the entrance and exit to the exhibition. This memory mix may stimulate and unlock other personal memories which will either be fed back into the Memory Machine or simulate a mental space for reverie and remembering, stimulated by power of sound."



The Memory Machine

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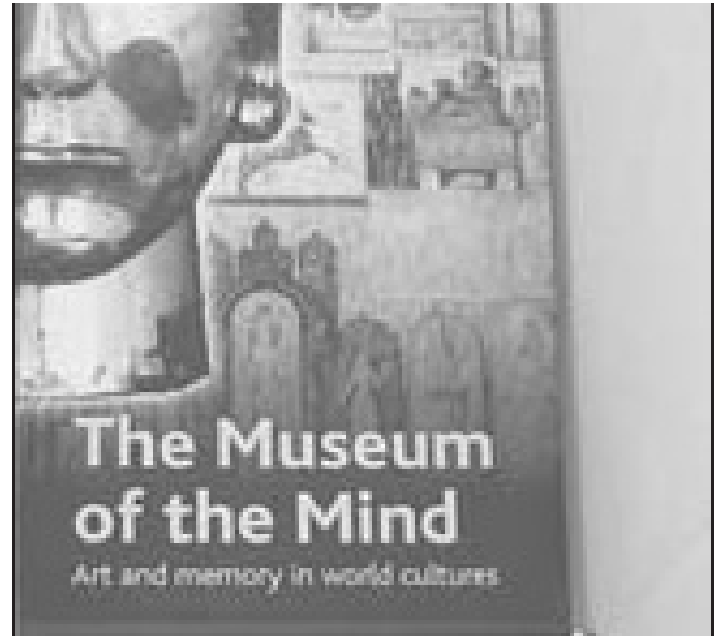


The Memory Machine

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